



File Code: 1950/2400

Date: July 31, 2003

Dear Interested Party:

I made a decision to approve resource activities, including timber harvesting, in Alternative 2 of the Swamp Timber Sale as described in the Swamp Timber Sale Environmental Assessment. The selected alternative harvests approximately 949 acres using a variety of even-aged regeneration methods. The volume of wood to be harvested is expected to be approximately 9,700 CCF (cunits). This alternative mimics the scale and intensity natural disturbance using timber harvest and prescribed fire. As part of this action, there is an opportunity to manage road segments by decommissioning, relocating, or reconstructing them to prevent sediment pollution. Proposed activities will occur three miles east of the Big Goose Ranger Station, approximately 18 miles southwest of Sheridan in Sheridan County, Wyoming.

The associated Decision Notice, and Finding of No Significant Impact are available on the Bighorn National Forest web page at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/> or upon request from Scott Hill – Team Leader, 2013 Eastside Second Street, Sheridan WY 82801 (telephone: 307-674-2600).

Legal notice of this decision will appear in the Sheridan Press. Appeals must be postmarked or received no later than 45 days after the publication of the legal notice in the Sheridan Press, as specified in 36 CFR 215.13. The Forest Supervisor shall promptly mail the decision document to those who request the specific document.

My decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to the November 11, 1993, 36 CFR 215.7. Any appeal of my decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, Content of an Appeal, and must meet the following requirements:

1. State that the document is an appeal filed pursuant to the November 11, 1993, 36 CFR 215.7;
2. The name and address of the appellant, and if possible, a telephone number;
3. Identification of the decision document by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the deciding official;
4. Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that appellant seeks or portion of the decision to which the appellant objects;
5. State how the deciding official's decision fails to consider comments previously provided, and if applicable, how the appellant believes the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.



Appeals must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer:

Regional Forester, Rocky Mountain Region
USDA Forest Service
PO Box 25127
Lakewood, CO 80225-0127

A concurrent copy must be sent to me:

William T. Bass, Forest Supervisor
USDA Forest Service
Bighorn National Forest
2013 Eastside Second St.
Sheridan, WY 82801

For additional information about this project, the appeal process, or to receive a copy of the Environmental Assessment contact:

Scott Hill – Team Leader
2013 Eastside Second Street
Sheridan WY 82801
Phone: 307-674-2600

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of the appeal disposition.

Sincerely,



WILLIAM T. BASS
Forest Supervisor

DECISION NOTICE
Swamp Timber Sale

USDA Forest Service
Bighorn National Forest
Tongue Ranger District
Sheridan, Wyoming

DECISION SUMMARY

This decision notice documents my decision to select Alternative 2, - Historic Scale Openings as described in the Swamp Timber Sale Environmental Assessment. The selected alternative harvests a total of 949 acres using a variety of even-aged regeneration methods. The volume of wood to be harvested is expected to be approximately 9,700 CCF (cunits). This alternative mimics the scale and intensity of natural disturbance using timber harvest and prescribed fire. As part of this action, there is an opportunity to manage road segments by decommissioning, relocating, or reconstructing them to prevent sediment pollution.

Proposed activities would occur three miles east of the Big Goose Ranger Station, approximately 18 miles southwest of Sheridan in Sheridan County, Wyoming.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

A majority of the Swamp timber sale area falls within the 7E- Wood Fiber Production management area prescription. In the Forest Plan, lands were allocated to management areas based on management prescriptions. These prescriptions provide specific direction and a management emphasis for the area. The management area prescriptions and acreages for the Swamp project area, taken from the Resource Information System database, are shown in the table below.

Management Area Prescriptions

Forest Plan Prescription	Description of Prescription	Acres
3A	Semi-Primitive Non-motorized Recreation	1243
4B	Wildlife Habitat Management for One or More Management Indicator Species	49
6B	Livestock Grazing, Maintain Forage Composition	1785
7E	Wood Fiber Production	3944
9A*	Riparian and Aquatic Ecosystem Management	*

* Neither the RIS database, or the Forest Plan Management Area map show 9A acres or areas. These were defined in the Forest Plan as "...the aquatic ecosystem, the riparian ecosystem (characterized by distinct vegetation), and adjacent ecosystems that remain within approximately 100 ft. measure horizontally from both edges of all perennial streams and from the shores of lakes and other still water bodies." The above listed management areas have 9A inclusions within them.

Dwarf mistletoe, Comandra blister rust, and western gall rust are present in many lodgepole pine stands in the analysis area.

Continued fire suppression will cause further risk of fire damage from an increase in dead vegetation. By managing stand density and tree species composition, the risk of insect and disease infestations and stand replacing wildfires are reduced. In addition, thinning stands will give the desired trees room and resources to grow and maintain their health and the hiding cover they provide.

Past management-decisions created the existing road system in the project area. Many of the roads are closed with metal gates; however, several culverts and the fill material in riparian areas remain in place. Some of the roads are completely grassed over, while others are still in use. Several trails are located in riparian areas. Roads located near or in riparian areas are leading causes of stream sediment

The current mix and proportion of age class and structural stage for lodgepole pine in the analysis area is skewed toward pole-sized timber about 100 to 150 years old. Lodgepole pine in the 1.5 inch to 8.9 inch diameter class (structural stages 3A, 3B, and 3C) currently makes up 63 percent of the total lodgepole cover in this area. This condition favors wildlife that requires large areas of even-aged pine.

Late successional forests (old growth) are in short supply in parts of the analysis area. To improve habitat for other types of wildlife, it is desirable to modify the proportion and dispersion of forest age classes. Many of the stands in this particular analysis area, are essentially stagnant and the best management practice is to clearcut the stand and regenerate. The replacement trees should be kept thinned over time so that the forest will have the type of structure needed for wildlife species that depend on mature forest

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of and need for the Swamp Timber Sale is to provide merchantable timber, improve the vegetative structural diversity, manage roads and trails, improve or maintain wildlife habitat diversity, and fuels management in the proximity of the private ownership in the Teepee creek watershed.

There is the need to:

- Improve vegetative structural diversity area wide
- Increase forest resilience to fire, insects, disease, and other catastrophic change
- Reduce Dwarf mistletoe, Comandra blister rust, and western gall rust
- Maintain hiding cover and improve wildlife habitat diversity
- Manage roads and trails in the area to meet Forest Plan objectives
- Comply with the Clean Water Act (Forest Plan page III-5)
- Provide for a more efficient and manageable transportation system.
- Manage road and trail segments to avoid sedimentation of streams
- Utilize fire management techniques in proximity to private ownership to improve wildland fire control and management (Forest Plan, page III-6)

PROPOSED ACTION

1. Provide wood products in a sustainable manner.
2. Improve the structural and genetic diversity of forested vegetation.
3. Treat stands to reduce the spread of forest pests.
4. Improve the structural and genetic diversity of forested vegetation.
5. Improve and restore watershed conditions primarily in the Swamp and Teepee creek drainages by:
 - Disconnecting the existing road system from the stream network
 - Disconnecting user defined dispersed recreation areas from the stream network
 - Reconstructing roads at stream crossings to remove a potential sediment source
 - Revegetation and improving drainage on roads and trails
 - Implement travel management restrictions

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND SCOPING

A formal scoping letter was mailed to 71 individuals, interest groups, organizations, tribes, and other governmental agencies. A news release was published in the Sheridan Press and multiple other media contacts announcing the public scoping period. The project was also described in the Bighorn National Forest NEPA Quarterly Report from April 1998 through April 2003 that is mailed to over 200 individuals and organizations and placed on the Bighorn National Forest web page for public access. Nine letters were received in response to scoping, and total 21 individuals or groups expressed interest in staying on the mailing list for this project.

Scoping comments included: statements supporting or not supporting the idea of harvesting timber; how to conduct the analysis or project; a variety of wildlife and wildlife habitat concerns; suggested harvesting methods; impacts to recreational use; soils and water quality concerns; road density; reforestation; old growth; forest health; riparian, aquatic and fisheries protection; road building and access concerns; and the potential for future fires.

Letters were sent to the 21 individuals and groups who were interested in staying involved with the Swamp Timber Sale project stating the Predecisional Environmental Assessment was available to the public on the Forest web page. Public notice was published in the Sheridan Press April 26, 2003. The comment period for the Predecisional Environmental Assessment ended June 25, 2003. Agency staff, other state and federal agencies, and the public reviewed the Predecisional Environmental Assessment and the proposed action. No timely or responsive comments were received on the Predecisional Environmental Assessment for this project.

ISSUES

1. Condition of the existing timber resource including the appropriate silvicultural systems.
2. The proper location, standard, and amount of roads/trails in the analysis area
3. Habitat for big game including; habitat diversity, the size of openings, and future habitat

ALTERNATIVES

The alternatives considered in detail include a no action alternative, and two harvesting alternatives that respond to the needs for action and issues (See Section 1.4 and 2.1 of the environmental assessment). Other alternatives were eliminated from detailed study.

Alternative 1-No Action, Continuation Of Existing Management

This alternative was developed to serve as a baseline for the effects analysis. No action, in this case, means no change from the present management. There will be no timber harvest and no regeneration treatments conducted. That is, the forested stands will change under the processes of natural succession, with the disturbance elements of fire, insects, and diseases operating. No watershed improvement work will be conducted in this area at this time.

Alternative 2 - Historic Scale Openings (Preferred Alternative)

This alternative is designed to:

- Emulate or mimic aspects of the natural disturbance patterns for this area, namely the scale and intensity using timber harvest and prescribed fire, including harvests over 40 acres.
- Improve previous harvest treatments by removal of infected overstory trees.
- Improve the age and size class distribution of timbered stands.
- Treat stands to reduce the spread of forest pests to the young forest stands.
- Reclassify Forest Development Road 286 to a non-motorized trail.
- Close and decommission segments of existing trails and roads.

Alternative 3 - Small Scale Openings Created

This is an action alternative designed to:

- Deviate from emulating, and mimicking aspects of the natural disturbance patterns for this area, namely the scale and intensity thereby giving a more defined, and increased edge affect to the timber stand landscape by using timber harvest and prescribed fire.
- Close and decommission segments of existing trails and roads.
- Treat stands to reduce the spread of forest pests to the younger forest stands.
- Reclassify Forest Development Road 286 to a non-motorized trail.
- Improve previous harvest treatments by removal of infected overstory trees.
- Improve the age and size distribution of the timbered stands.

ALTERNATIVES NOT CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

The following alternatives were considered and eliminated from detailed analysis:

1. An alternative that utilized more shelterwood regeneration methods:

An emphasis on shelterwood regeneration was considered. The Forest Supervisor determined this would not meet the purpose and need of the project. Structural diversity will not be created soon enough. Shelterwood regeneration methods do not create grass forb structural stages, and takes over 20 years to create seedling sapling structural stages. Both of these stages are lacking in the area (See Final EA page G-1, and the project record).

2. Continuation of selection (uneven-aged silviculture) as the dominant prescription:

The decision maker decided not to force uneven-aged management on an ecosystem where the majority of the lodgepole forests are even-aged due to large stand replacing fire history.

Selection management is approved but is not a standard practice (Forest Plan, page III-46). This area is primarily influenced by even-aged lodgepole pine stands, and the plants and animals in this ecosystem have evolved under this regime.

3. Separate vegetative treatments from travel management:

- Both of these actions are intertwined and included in the purpose and need for this project. As both actions have effects on the same resources, i.e. soils, water, recreation, wildlife etc. it was determined that the analysis needed to consider both actions in the alternatives. To separate them will not provide the decision maker with a complete picture of the effects.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The tables below summarize the predicted environmental consequences for the action alternatives of this project, and the treatment of issues by alternative.

Summary Comparison of Alternatives-Differences

	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
Alternative Summary	No action, continuation of current management.	Utilize various harvest methods with clearcuts over 40 acres to emulate scale and pattern of natural disturbance.	Utilize various harvest methods but keeping clearcut size 40 acres or less.
Forest regeneration and treatments to timbered stands (Acres are approximate)	No timber sale or treatments; existing firewood use will continue.	486* acres clearcut 329* acres overstory removal 134* acres shelterwood. <u>Total Acres: 949*</u>	240* acres clearcut 382* acres overstory removal 89* acres shelterwood <u>Total Acres: 711</u>
Types/ number of harvest units and clearcut sizes (Acres are approximate)	None.	10 clearcuts Two units over 40 acres Unit 28 - 189* Unit 30 - 154* 7 overstory removal cuts; 2 shelterwood seed cuts. <u>Total Estimate Harvest Units: 19</u>	13 clearcuts Two units ≈ 40 acres Unit 13 - 40* acres, and Unit 21 - 39* acres 13 overstory removal cuts 1 shelterwood seed cut. <u>Total Estimate Harvest Units: 27</u>
Decommission, segments of existing roads and improve trails.	No decommissioning of existing roads will occur. No change to trail 029-creek crossing (Squaw creek) or trail improvement through a meadow.	2.8* miles of existing road decommissioned, 4 miles temporary road. Trail 029, creek crossing improved, User defined ATV trails decommissioned.	Same as Alternative 2
Road improvements (construction and reconstruction) of open existing roads.	There will be no road improvements to open roads.	FDR 316 repaired and re-aligned to allow logging 2.2* miles of reconstruction.	Same as Alternative 2

** These number are approximate*

Comparison Treatment of Issues By The Action Alternatives

Issue	Alternative 2 – Preferred Alternative	Alternative 3
Treatment of the existing timber resource including the appropriate silvicultural systems; includes disease treatment and long term wildlife and habitat impacts	<p>Addressed Through Opening Size Large Opening will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imitate median natural disturbance scale and intensity via timber harvest/Rx fire with clearcuts > 40 acres • Improve stand condition by removing diseased trees • Improve stand age/ size class distribution for long term wildlife habitat • Reduce forest pest spread to young forest stands • Create early habitat structural stages • Provide habitat diversity for early seral dependant species i.e. Canada Lynx. • Establish long term, interior habitat 	<p>Addressed Through Opening Size Smaller Opening Size Would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depart from median natural disturbance scale and intensity via timber harvest/Rx fire with clearcuts < 40 acres • Fewer acres Improve stand condition by removing diseased trees. • Increased edge affect to the timber stand landscape by using timber harvest and prescribed fire. • Reduce forest pest spread to young forest stands • Create less early habitat structural stages • Provide less habitat diversity for early seral dependant species i.e. Canada Lynx. • Establish less long term, interior habitat
The proper location, standard, and amount of roads/trails in the analysis area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roads analysis identified 2.8* miles of roads for decommissioning, and reclassification. See Tables 2-2 and 2-3 of environmental assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
Habitat for big game, (elk, moose and deer) which includes wildlife habitat diversity, and the size of openings	<p>Addressed through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size of created openings • Decommission roads <p>Mitigations 1, 6, 7, 8, 9 under the Terrestrial Wildlife sub- section in section 2.3.2 of environmental assessment</p>	<p>Addressed through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decommission roads • Mitigations 1, 6, 7, 8, 9 under the Terrestrial Wildlife sub- section in section 2.3.2 of environmental assessment

** These number are approximate*

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

The comment period for the Predecisional Environmental Assessment ended June 25, 2003. Agency staff, other state and federal agencies, and the public reviewed the Predecisional Environmental Assessment and the proposed action. No timely or responsive comments were received on the Predecisional Environmental Assessment for this project.

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

Alternative 2 - Historic Scale Openings is the selected alternative.

ACTIONS TO BE IMPLEMENTED

The table below shows the harvest actions to be completed under this action.

Treatments of Forested Vegetation Under Alternative 2

Timber Treatment	Estimated Number of Units	Approximate Acres
Clearcut with 7 to 40 acre uncut tree pathces	10	486
Overstory Removal/ Precommercial Thinning To Diseased Overstory Trees	4	219
Overstory Removal To Diseased Overstory Trees	3	110
Shelterwood Seed Cut	2	134
Totals	19	949*
* Estimated Volume removal is 9,700 CCF (Cunits)		

The table below shows the road closure actions to be completed under this action.

Summary of Proposed Road Activities

Proposed Road Activity	Alt. 2
Miles of Proposed Reconstruction	2.2
Miles of New Road Construction	None
Miles of Temporary Road Construction	0.4
Miles of Yearlong Closure	11.6
Miles of Decommissioning	2.8

DESIGN FEATURES OF THE ACTION

The following is a list of design features to address specific resources concerns for Alternative 2.

- Attention during unit layout will be given to meeting the Forest Plan visual quality standards and guidelines
- Clearcut units layout will be based on natural opening size and shape
- Narrow leave strips and rings of timber along watercourses and other natural breaks will be avoided where practicable; Best Management Practices will take precedence when protecting riparian areas
- Leave islands specified for wildlife will be used to break up views of clearcuts

- Protection measures for advanced regeneration will be used in regeneration cuts
- Retain adequate cones to increase seed availability and augment genetic diversity in area
- Retain tops and limbs on site for nutrient cycling, soil stabilization, and to reduce potential damage to residual stand in overstory removal and shelterwood harvest units
- Broadcast burn for site preparation in clearcuts
- Natural regeneration is expected, however fill in planting will be used as needed to meet National Forest Management Act 5-year regeneration requirement
- Units will be a minimum of 100 feet from the edge of perennial streams; harvest activity and temporary roads locations are not planned within a streamside management zone
- Adequate buffer zones will be used in other riparian areas within units; these buffer zones may coincide with the snag leave islands
- Best management practices will be adhered to in addition to 9A management areas standards and guidelines for riparian and aquatic areas
- In overstory and clearcut units, sub-merchantable and cull trees remaining outside snag islands will be treated; smaller size class trees will be felled and larger size class trees girdled for wildlife habitat
- Log hauling will be prohibited on weekends to minimize conflicts with other forest users using the access roads
- All timber harvest operations will be restricted from November 15 through June 30 to reduce impacts to the Wyoming State Snowmobile routes and disturbances to big game movement and calving (moose and elk) during the spring months
- Open roads will be utilized for public firewood collecting opportunities
- Typical fuelwood gathering behind gated-closed roads will not be permitted to ensure snag retention
- Existing travel roads currently closed and scheduled to remain closed after this harvest entry will have site-specific road closure measures utilized to increase closure effectiveness; these will be identified in a written prescription for each road.
- Livestock fence will be constructed, as needed, to mitigate the loss of natural barriers caused by the timber harvest (\approx one mile of new fence will be necessary after harvest)
- Landing slash will be scattered before burning to reduce detrimental soil scorching associated with windrows and piles
- Overstory Removal, precommercial thinning, and Shelterwood Seed Cuts will have slash lopped and scattered to 24 inches; except along Forest Development Road 309 and Forest Development Road 316 where within approximately 130 feet of the road it will be hand piled to reduce fire hazard and to achieve partial retention visual guidelines
- Two temporary roads of approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ mile will be required to complete timber harvesting; additional short (\approx 100 feet segments) jump off temporary roads needed to utilize landings adjacent existing roads during harvest activities will also be required
- All temporary road locations will be pre-approved by the Forest Service, and decommissioned by the timber contract purchaser after use
- Temporary road reclamation will include some, all, or a combination of, ripping, scattering wood debris onto the road and applying grass seed methods
- Existing landings, and roads currently closed to the public, will be utilized where practicable to reduce additional road construction and soil disturbance

- Temporary roads will be constructed to the minimum standard necessary to accommodate the anticipated use and equipment
- Temporary roads decommissioning will follow the completion of the harvest activity during seasons when precipitation and erosion potential are minimal
- Design openings to maximize sinuosity of edges, and minimize opening size as practicable; A Patton edge-shape index of 1.4 will be achieved or exceeded as feasible (Forest Plan III-23)
- Wildlife leave/snag leave tree islands will be designated before harvest; small clumps of spruce or alpine fir will be incorporated into these patches as snag islands where feasible
- Leave tree islands will be approximately three times tree height in diameter and include a variety of ages and stages of decay as practicable
- Snags will be retained at a minimum of 20 to 30 snags per 10 acres; in clearcuts an average of 30-40 snags per 10 acres will be used, except in units 22 and 25 that are less than 10 acres. For these units, the uncut acreage surrounding the harvest will provide the snags needed to Forest Plan standards
- Seven to fifteen tons of coarse woody debris per acre should remain after harvest to meet coarse woody debris needs for wildlife habitat and soils concerns; smaller size class trees felled for wildlife habitat can be included in this measure
- All harvest activities will be restricted from May 1 to August 15 within 1000 feet of any active raptor nest discovered after award of the timber sale contract
- Protection to threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants and animals discovered after award of the timber sale contract will be provided using provision of the timber contract
- Raptor nest trees are to be protected from being cut down
- Designate areas of existing old-growth forest and candidate sites to meet the Forest Plan minimum of 5 percent; old growth sites to be managed for late successional characteristics are identified in Table 2-4 of the final environmental assessment, on page 2-12
- No crossings over perennial streams will be allowed for log skid trails or temporary roads
- Intermittent and ephemeral channel crossings will utilize best management practices if encountered
- Landings will be located away from draws and swales and out of streamside management zones
- Skid trails will be located to prevent concentrating runoff
- Areas of concentrated use will be treated to prevent erosion
- All operations will be conducted to prevent rutting or excessive soil disturbance
- Where practicable, soil disturbance on steeper grounds will be minimized when constructing fireline within 100 feet of a riparian area; hand line construction techniques will be used in these situations
- Require the timber purchaser to immediately repair any fences damaged by timber harvest activities
- Require prior authorization from the Forest Service if removal of an existing fence or segment is necessary
- Utilize timber-sale contract provisions to insure that fence gates are closed following passage
- Require all machinery used in timber harvesting activities to be thoroughly cleaned before being transported to the sale area

MONITORING

- The silvicultural prescriptions and the layout monitoring will be the tools used to insure that units are laid out to achieve these requirements
- Periodic field monitoring will be done on those sites where aspen regeneration is observed to ensure survival
- Before the sale termination date, at least one watershed management review will be conducted to monitor project implementation and effects
- Roads and skid trails will be monitored to ensure that they are stable and not eroding into stream courses. Water quality will be monitored by ocular clarity
- Review one growing season post-harvest for new introductions of invasive weed species weeds

DECISION CRITERIA AND RATIONALE FOR DECISION

I have reviewed the environmental assessment and the project file for the Swamp Timber Sale. I have determined that the environmental impacts of the selected action are not significant. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. I have decided to implement Alternative 2, which harvests a total of 949 acres using a variety of even-aged regeneration methods. The volume of wood to be harvested, in cubic feet, is expected to be approximately 9,700 CCF (cunits).

This alternative most closely mimics the scale and intensity of natural disturbance using timber harvest and prescribed fire. Openings over 40 acres are within the historic range of variation for patch size and age class distribution are based on an administrative study on the Bighorn National Forest. RIS data, and historic fire records dating to 1895 were used to determine the maximum, minimum, and median fire sizes for the Bighorn National Forest. The summary data for this study is in Appendix G of the final environmental assessment, and as part of the project record. However, maximum recorded fire size in acres for the Bighorn National Forest since 1895 is 50, 000 acres; minimum recorded fire size has been 11 acres. Mean acreage is 856, and median acreage is 200. The mathematical median is supported by our data, and much more socially acceptable than treatments of 50,000 acres.

Treatments of Forested Vegetation Under Alternative 2

Timber Treatment	Estimated Number of Units	Approximate Acres
Clearcut with 7 to 40 acre reserves	10	486
Overstory Removal/ Precommercial Thinning To Diseased Overstory Trees	4	219
Overstory Removal To Diseased Overstory Trees	3	110
Shelterwood Seed Cut	2	134
Totals	19	949*
* Estimated Volume removal is 9,700 CCF (Cunits)		

As part of this action, there is an opportunity to manage road segments by decommissioning, relocating, or reconstructing them to prevent sediment pollution. The table below displays the approximate acres, treatment types, and number of units of vegetation to be treated under Alternative 2

Alternative 2 includes clearcut harvest of 2 units larger than 40 acres in size: one 154 acres and one 189 acres in size. The Regional Forester has reviewed and approved the request for harvest units exceeding 40 acres in size in the Swamp Timber Sale project as required under 36 CFR 219.27(d)(2)(ii). The review consisted of a review of the Predecisional Environmental Analysis, photos and maps of the proposed harvest areas, silvicultural diagnoses of the affected sites, public comments regarding the proposal received by the Forest, and discussions with Forest personnel.

My rationale, and scientific foundation for fire regime characteristics, and assertion that openings over 40 acres are within the historic range of variation for patch size and age class distribution are based on an administrative study on the Bighorn National Forest. RIS data, and historic fire records dating to 1895 were used to determine the maximum, minimum, and median fire sizes for the Bighorn National Forest. The summary data for this study is in environmental assessment on page G-1, and available as part of the project record.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision to implement Alternative 2 is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives listed on pages III-3 to III-6. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines in the alternative design.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The following discussion summarizes key portions of the environmental assessment. The environmental assessment was completed in order to disclose the effects of the proposed action and subsequent alternatives for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact.

Context:

One of the primary purposes of Forest Planning is to allocate areas of the National Forest to management prescriptions or designation of a management emphasis for a specific piece of land. The 1985 Forest Plan allocated land to three different Management Areas within the timber sale area (See page 1, Management Area Prescriptions Table).

The Forest Plan allows for timber harvest for timber production and related activities in all four of the non-riparian management areas.

- Forest Plan standards and guidelines will be met under Alternative 2. Specifically, wildlife standards and guidelines for elk cover and habitat capability for other MIS will be met.
- There are no “roadless areas” affected by this action.

Intensity:

Other environmental effects are also minimal such as percentage of disturbed watershed, elk habitat effectiveness, visual impacts, and water quality. The disclosed environmental effects are minimal partially due to the following factors:

- Alternative 2 would not cause sufficient direct effects to the sediment delivery, peakflow, riparian condition, or channel stability to create destabilizing indirect effects on channel equilibrium
- The road system is already in place.
- Effected area is 949 acres.

Environmental Effects

I find that there are no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts on the resources or components of the human environment associated with the decision being made. The impacts shown in the environmental assessment are small or limited in size (Section 2.10 in the environmental assessment for Summary of Alternatives and Section 3.10 for Summary of Cumulative Effects). The design criteria for Alternative 2 minimize impacts and are detailed in Chapter 2 of the environmental assessment.

I find that there are no irretrievable or irreversible commitments of resources associated with the Alternative 2. This determination is based on the previously demonstrated success of vegetation management prescriptions that allowed for excellent regeneration of the forested ecosystem. As disclosed in Chapter 4, the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects are all very minimal.

Public Health and Safety

Both of the action alternatives pose minimal risk to public safety considering timber harvest activity within the vicinity of the other multiple use activities.

The risks have been mitigated through inclusion of the following design criteria:

- All snowmobile trails currently on the State of Wyoming snowmobile trail system would be protected by a no harvest activity period from November 15 through June 30.
- Log hauling would be prohibited on weekends (Friday-4 p.m. through Sunday-10 p.m.) and Federal holidays (24 hour period), to minimize conflicts with other forest users using the access roads. All timber harvest operations would be restricted from November 15 through June 30 to reduce impacts to the Wyoming State Snowmobile routes and disturbances to big game movement and calving (moose and elk) during the spring months.

Unique Characteristics of the Geographic Area

There are no prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or wetlands. The effects on watershed and water quality were disclosed in Chapter 3, Section 3.6.1, and 3.6.2 under watershed and aquatic habitats sections. There are no cultural resource or historic sites within the timber sale area. I find that there are no significant effects on any of these resources.

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

I find that the analysis shows that effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. The effects are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks. All of the alternatives, including the no action alternative, will eventually result in some change to the timber component of the vegetative ecosystem. These changes have a known effect on the human environment. The primary risks associated with timber management are direct effects to people in the vicinity and those risks have been mitigated through design criteria. In the specific case of the Swamp timber sale, this is a second harvest entry; with well know effects from the sales in this area in 1979 and again in 1990.

The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions

I find that this action is not precedent setting. Timber harvesting, and road management are management tools used in the past at many locations on the Bighorn National Forest.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant impacts

Considering the disclosures in the environmental assessment, I find that cumulative effects are not significant. The overall cumulative effects were summarized in Section 3.10 of the environmental assessment.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species List.

I find this analysis indicates no effects to any federally listed or proposed threatened or endangered species. Specifically, no impacts are anticipated to such listed species as the Canada Lynx or Bald Eagle. In addition, the biologist determined that for the Forest Service sensitive species, there may be some effect on individuals, but actions will not lead to a listing of the species on the Endangered Species List. I find that implementing Alternative 2 may adversely

impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the Planning Area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability rangewide.

The degree to which the action may adversely effect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, historical resources.

Cultural resources have been fully addressed in Chapter 3 of the environmental assessment.

The district archaeologist performed a complete survey of the timber sale area and no sites were located. I find that implementation of the action alternative (2) will have no direct or indirect effect to any heritage resource.

The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the environmental assessment.

The action is consistent with the Bighorn Land and Resource Management Plan (See environmental assessment page 2-3, and 3-1).

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND APPEAL RIGHTS STATEMENT

Legal notice of this decision will appear in the Sheridan Press. Appeals must be postmarked or received no later than 45 days after the publication of the legal notice in the Sheridan Press, as specified in 36 CFR 215.13. The Forest Supervisor shall promptly mail the decision document to those who request the specific document and to those who submitted comments on the proposed action either before or during the environmental assessment comment period. Copies of the environmental assessment will be provided upon request or on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn>.

My decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to the November 11, 1993, 36 CFR 215.7. Any appeal of my decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, Content of an Appeal, and must meet the following requirements:

1. State that the document is an appeal filed pursuant to the November 11, 1993, 36 CFR 215.7;
2. The name and address of the appellant, and if possible, a telephone number;
3. Identification of the decision document by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the deciding official;
4. Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that appellant seeks or portion of the decision to which the appellant objects;
5. State how the deciding official's decision fails to consider comments previously provided, and if applicable, how the appellant believes the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.

Appeals must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer:

Regional Forester, Rocky Mountain Region
USDA Forest Service
PO Box 25127
Lakewood, CO 80225-0127

A concurrent copy must be sent to me:

William T. Bass, Forest Supervisor
USDA Forest Service
Bighorn National Forest
2013 Eastside Second St.
Sheridan, WY 82801

For additional information about this project, the appeal process, or to receive a copy of the Environmental Assessment contact:

Scott Hill – Team Leader
2013 Eastside Second Street
Sheridan WY 82801
Phone: 307-674-2600

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of the appeal disposition.

William T. Bass *William T. Bass* Date 07-25-03
Forest Supervisor
Bighorn National Forest

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